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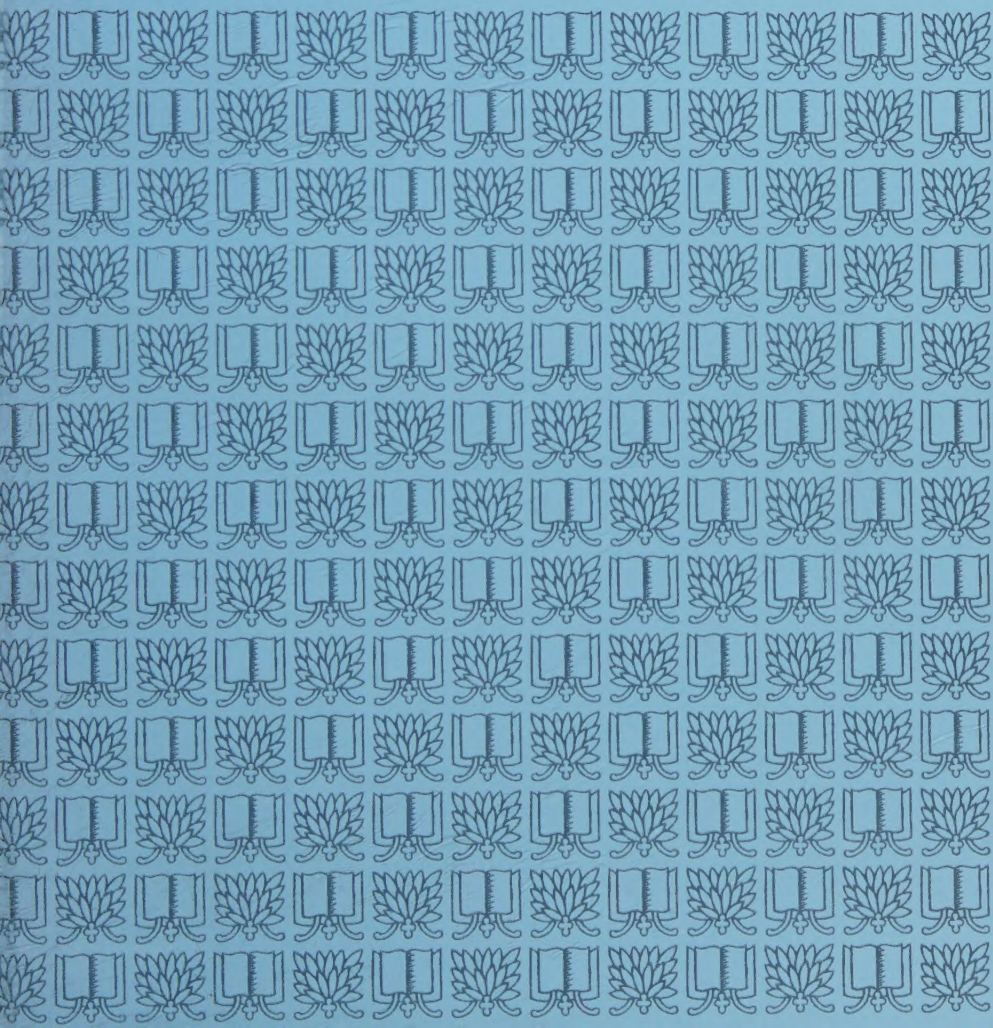
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ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF

REV PROF. STANLEY MCIVOR

B.A.,BD., PH.D

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Guest Editor

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SAMSON AND THE HONEYTRAPS:

YAHWEH'S USE OF WOMEN TO ENSNARE SAMSON

Fred H. Ruddell

In this paper I extend Brueggemann's well-known countertestimony model to provide a theological framework for the Samson narrative (Judges 13-16). To do this, I propose adding to Israel's countertestimony of abuse the claim that *Yahweh is the deity who traps*. I examine Samson's relationships with the Timnite woman, the Gaza prostitute and Delilah, showing how Yahweh used these women to ensnare Samson in a succession of 'honeytraps'. I identify a wisdom-literature theme in Samson's life that acts as countertestimony of the hiddenness of Yahweh and I also find evidence of a more overtly abusive form of countertestimony where Yahweh used women to 'entice'/'seduce' Samson. I conclude that the story of Samson's life demonstrates theological countertestimony expressed within the framework of sexual entrapment, so that Yahweh could use Samson to exact his vengeance against the Philistines and their god, Dagon.

Introduction

Although Samson was not a national leader like Deborah or Gideon, he nevertheless fulfils a pivotal role in the book of Judges. When the people of Israel yet again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and were punished by Philistine oppression, Samson was heralded as the one who 'would begin to deliver Israel' (Judg. 13.5). In fact, Samson and Othniel are the only major 'judges' who also 'delivered' Israel.¹ It is particularly ironic that the wayward Danite, Samson, should be so linked with Othniel, the Judahite who is regarded as the model judge.² However, the so-called deliverance that Samson wrought against the Philistines in revenge for being blinded (16.28) did not

¹ Only the lesser figure, Tola, also specifically judged (שפט) and delivered (ישע) Israel.

² Indeed, Marc Zvi Brettler sees Judges as a highly political, pro-David book, believing that Othniel 'was created as a model of an unambiguously positive Judean leader'; *The Book of Judges* (Old Testament Readings; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 111.

immediately translate into peace in Israel. The tribal league simply disintegrated into 'every man for himself', thus emphasising the need for strong national leadership in the form of a king. Since Samson acted as the bridging figure between the earlier 'conventional' judges and the chaos of Judges 17-21, he may be described as the 'chaotic judge', around whom the book of Judges revolves.

Therefore, a study of the Samson narrative (Judges 13-16) will illuminate the message of the book of Judges as a whole. However, the very nature of this 'chaotic judge' resists thematisation. This is a characteristic of the Old Testament and those who adopt an overly systematic thematisation risk reductionism.³ Yet a framework is still required which is capable of reconciling the disjunctive nature of the Samson narrative with the coincident and persistent theological theme that underlies the entire book of Judges. This framework must recognise the demise of positivist theologies that largely reflected the philosophies and cultural products spawned by the Enlightenment.⁴ Brueggemann's well-known and imaginative response to this 'collapse of history' is to adopt the interactive language of core testimony and countertestimony within the context of a court of law, thus allowing the '*plurality of voices*' which comprise the substance of Old Testament theology to be heard.⁵ I suggest that this dialectic approach provides a suitably inclusive model to facilitate an investigation of the enigmatic character of Samson and his links with the equally enigmatic character of Yahweh.

³ Indeed, Bruce K. Waltke believes that 'the discipline of Old Testament theology is necessarily reductionistic – the emphasis has to be on the selection of major concepts of the books and on the development of major themes that are shared by the various books'; *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 51.

⁴ Leo G. Perdue, *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 2005), p. 3.

⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1997), p. xvi, italics original.

Brueggemann only mentions Samson texts indirectly in his *Theology*, in the context of sexual abuse in countertestimony.⁶ However, it is appropriate and desirable to extend this countertestimony model to provide a theological framework for the entire Samson story. To do this, I propose adding to Israel's countertestimony of abuse the claim that *Yahweh is the deity who traps*. The escalating violence in the story eventually traps both Samson and the Philistines in a final, catastrophic event that would begin the liberation of Israel. I believe that this is the first time that a direct connection has been made between the Samson narrative and a theology of countertestimony. This approach therefore opens up hitherto unexplored avenues to assist in the understanding of the characters of both Samson and Yahweh.

In this paper I will focus on Samson's relationships with women, exploring how Yahweh used these women as traps, because Yahweh 'was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines' (Judg. 14.4). By studying this episode of the Samson story, I will demonstrate how Samson was ensnared in a succession of 'honeytraps'.

As Exum has so rightly pointed out: 'The story of Samson is a story about women. Just try to imagine it without them.'⁷ The central role played by Samson's mother is very evident in the birth narrative of Judges 13. Yahweh's plan for Samson's adult life is further enacted through his relationships with three more women: his Timnite bride, the Gaza prostitute, and Delilah (Judges 14-16). Indeed, Alter observes that Samson 'passes through' a series of three women who represent the full spectrum of female sexual partners, 'wife, whore and mistress'.⁸

In a parallel fashion, Matthews identifies the centrality of freedom in Samson's life, commenting that 'the traps that ensnare Samson begin

⁶ Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 360.

⁷ J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup, 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 61.

⁸ Robert Alter, 'Samson Without Folklore', in Susan Niditch (ed.), *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore* (SBL Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 47-56 (48).

at his birth and run through a series of encounters with Philistine women'.⁹ He interprets the Samson narrative within the framework of a three-stage 'trap motif' containing a series of steps through which Samson is ensnared in a web of sexual attraction to foreign women.¹⁰ First, Samson's involvement with the three Philistine women is always portrayed as resulting from his own uncontrolled physical desires. Secondly, each woman entices Samson into a trap. Thirdly, Samson's heroic action leads to his escape and ultimate revenge against the Philistines. I will now examine Samson's relationships with each of these women within the context of countertestimony, showing how Yahweh used women to trap Samson through a series of doomed sexual liaisons.

A 'Mixed' Marriage: Samson and the Timnite Woman

In Judges 14-15 the focus of Samson's life shifts from his anonymous mother to the anonymous woman of Timnah, whom he wanted as his wife (14.2). However, this woman was not an Israelite, she was a foreigner, 'one of the daughters of the Philistines' (14.1). The perils of associating with 'strange' (זרה), 'foreign' (נכרית) women are repeatedly emphasised in Proverbs 1-9. For example, wisdom is said to save a man 'from the forbidden [זרה] woman, from the adulteress [נכרית] with her smooth words' (Prov. 2.16; 7.5 ESV). Newsom argues that as a foreigner this woman recalls the strong Israelite cultural preference for endogamy over exogamy, 'the choice of same over other'.¹¹ The Timnite woman was created especially by Yahweh to ensnare Samson and he fell into the trap. Samson's trip to Timnah is an expression of divinely-induced restlessness and the Timnite woman who catches his eye is an agent of Yahweh's grand

⁹ Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 136.

¹⁰ Matthews, *Judges*, pp. 144-145.

¹¹ Carol A. Newsom also believes that, if the woman is an adultress, she may be called strange/foreign because she is legally 'off limits'; 'Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9', in Peggy L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1989), pp. 142-160 (148).

plan. This entrapment episode thus marks the next stage in Samson's God-ordained mission.

Presumably Samson found the Timnite woman very attractive, since the text twice emphasises that she was 'right in his eyes' (Judg. 14.3, 7).¹² The 'eyes' motif is central to the book of Judges and Samson is the pivotal character in the development of this theological theme. Samson's rejection of his parents' advice in favour of what was 'right in his eyes' now introduces the anarchy that will escalate throughout the closing chapters of the book of Judges. There, the repeated refrain that 'each man did what was right in his own eyes' (17.6; 21.25) is also associated with the comment that 'in those days there was no king in Israel' (17.6; 18.1; 19.1; 21.25). This statement is not used as a favourable description of the people's freedom but rather as a sign of lawlessness and may be viewed as an indicator of pro-monarchy, anti-tribal, ideology in Judges 17-21.¹³ Samson followed his eyes and his choice of bride led to a degenerating cycle of violence with the Philistines that was consistent with his divinely-ordained mission. Schneider notes the irony that at the end of the Samson story it is his eyes, which initiated the tragic events of his adulthood, that were destroyed (16.21).¹⁴ Samson's eyes caused his entrapment by women and were eventually the means by which the Philistines imprisoned him in darkness.

Samson's parents expressed surprise that he could not find a suitable bride from among their own people and stated their disapproval of his desire to take a wife from 'the uncircumcised Philistines' (Judg.

¹² The theological implications of this expression, that 'she was right in his mind/opinion, according to his standards rather than according to the standards of God', are noted by Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (New American Commentary, 6; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), p. 426.

¹³ Gale A. Yee, 'Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body', in Gale A. Yee (ed.), *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Augsburg-Fortress, 1995), pp. 146-170 (167).

¹⁴ Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 204.

14.3). In the Samson story it is only in Judges 14-15 that the Philistines are referred to by this highly derogatory label, 'the uncircumcised' (הערלים) (14.3; 15.18), which is more descriptively translated as 'the foreskinned'.¹⁵ In cultural terms, possession of foreskins meant that Philistines were viewed by the Israelites as 'dirty and barbaric'.¹⁶ Presumably the Philistines were equally bigotted against the Israelites and therefore Samson's proposed 'mixed' marriage to the Timnite woman was viewed with suspicion by both communities. Indeed, as Block believes, disapproval of Samson's plans was based simply on cultural and ethnic reasons, rather than any interest in covenantal issues.¹⁷

Samson's physical desire for this Philistine woman therefore led him inexorably down the path of conflict with the Philistines. This was no random path, as explained by the narrator in Judg. 14.4: 'His father and mother did not know that it was from Yahweh [מיהוה], for he was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.' The ignorance of Samson's parents is critical. Despite the hero's auspicious beginnings and their knowledge of his calling, they have failed to discern Yahweh's hidden plan. This marriage is Yahweh's response to Israel's willingness to coexist peacefully with the Philistines. Yahweh is determined to shatter the status quo and as Block observes, 'Samson is his tool chosen to rile up the Philistines, and this woman offers the opportunity to make it happen'.¹⁸ Although Samson appears to be a free spirit, doing whatever he pleases without respect for his parents or the claims of Yahweh on his life, he is in fact programmed and controlled by Yahweh to do his divine will.

¹⁵ The Philistines are also referred to as 'uncircumcised' in 1 Sam. 14.6; 17.26, 36; 31.4 (1 Chron. 10.4); 2 Sam. 1.20.

¹⁶ Schneider, *Judges*, p. 204.

¹⁷ Block, *Judges*, p. 425. It is unlikely that the link between circumcision and the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17) would have been at the forefront of Samson's parents' minds.

¹⁸ Block, *Judges*, p. 426.

Therefore Judg. 14.4 is a pivotal text which reveals the real driving force behind Samson's relationships with women. This verse echoes the wisdom-literature theme of Yahweh's sovereign inclination to override human intentions, as observed by Brueggemann in several texts in Proverbs.¹⁹ Indeed, Prov. 20.24 could almost be describing Samson when it states that 'a man's steps are from Yahweh [מִיְהוָה]; how then can man understand his way?' In fact Brettler argues that many of the stories contained in Judges 14-15, in contrast to the rest of the Samson material, 'have very close affinities to wisdom material and themes'.²⁰

It is notable that the reference to Yahweh in Judg. 14.4, like that in Prov. 20.24, does not assign a verb to Yahweh, but only a preposition. This lack of active verb of transformation is an important characteristic of Brueggemann's concept of Israel's countertestimony of Yahweh, which provides evidence that God is on many occasions 'hidden – indirect and not visible'.²¹ He believes that this most benign form of countertestimony is expressed within the context of wisdom theology.²² Since Brueggemann has found evidence for such countertestimony mainly in the books of Psalms and Proverbs, and Brettler has demonstrated links between Judges 14-15 and wisdom literature, I consider that it is now possible to associate this section of the Samson story with a countertestimony of the 'hiddenness' of Yahweh. Although Yahweh certainly appears to be largely absent from this narrative, his divine agenda is always being achieved in Samson's life.

Samson and 'The Spirit of Yahweh'

However unwittingly under Yahweh's control, Samson set out on his fateful journey to marry a Philistine girl. As he 'went down' to Timnah with his parents he alone was confronted by a roaring lion in

¹⁹ Prov. 16.1-2, 9; 19.14, 21; 20.24; 21.30-31. See Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 349.

²⁰ Brettler, *Judges*, p. 50.

²¹ Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 333.

²² Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 334.

the vineyards (Judg. 14.5).²³ Although there is no evidence that the animal actually attacked Samson, ‘the spirit of Yahweh [רוח יהוה] rushed [צלח] upon him’ and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands (v. 6). Although the spirit of Yahweh previously began to ‘stir’ (פעם) Samson in Mahaneh-dan (13.25),²⁴ this is the first time that God’s spirit ‘rushed’ (צלח) upon him, an experience repeated in Judg. 14.19 and 15.14. A similar phrase is used in Samuel’s commissioning of Saul (1 Sam. 10.6) and again when Saul is informed of the threat to Jabesh-gilead (1 Sam. 11.6). McCarter comments that for both Saul and Samson, ‘the hero experiences the spirit as an explosive surge of strength’.²⁵ Although, unlike Saul, Samson will never prophesy or lead the Israelites in battle, the phrase certainly suggests that Samson was somehow physically possessed by the invigorating spirit of God and thus empowered with superhuman strength. Yahweh was now flexing his muscles through Samson’s actions and the killing of the lion proved that Yahweh’s new weapon was now fully primed for action.

The other two occasions that Samson displayed his strength while empowered by Yahweh’s spirit are both direct actions against the Philistines. First, when Samson’s riddle was solved by the Philistines ‘the spirit of Yahweh rushed upon him’, enabling him to kill thirty men in the Philistine port of Ashkelon and use their garments to pay his wager (Judg. 14.19). Secondly, in Judg. 15.14, as the Philistines came out to meet the bound Samson at Lehi expecting to capture him, ‘the spirit of Yahweh rushed upon him’ and the ropes binding him disintegrated in his hands. Samson then

²³ J. Cheryl Exum observes that ‘repetition of the motif of going down structures the material in ch. 14 into four episodes’, each introduced by the verb ירד ‘to go down’ (14.1, 5, 7, 19); ‘Aspects of Symmetry and Balance in the Samson Saga’, *JSOT* 19 (1981), pp. 3-29 (12-13).

²⁴ Judg. 13.25 ‘forms an inclusio with Judg. 16.31a, beginning and ending the exploits of Samson “between Zorah and Eshtaol”’; J. Cheryl Exum, ‘The Theological Dimension of the Samson Saga’, *VT* 33 (1983), pp. 30-45 (38 n. 18).

²⁵ P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes & Commentary* (AB, 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980), p. 182.

went on the offensive, using a jawbone of a donkey to slaughter one thousand Philistines (v. 15).²⁶ Yahweh's plan to stir up the relationship between Israel and the Philistines was now in full swing.

However, it is also important to note when Samson's violent actions are *not* empowered either by the spirit of Yahweh or by a response to Samson's call for divine assistance. First, when Samson is refused entry to his wife's chamber we are told that he vents his frustration by setting fire to their grain, vineyards and olive groves with burning torches tied to foxes' tails (Judg. 15.1-5). Although this is presented as an impressive anti-Philistine act which strikes at the heart of their economy, Margalith dismisses it as an 'aetiological story' ascribed to Samson.²⁷ The Hebrew word שועל used in Judg. 15.4 ('fox' or 'jackal') may also be associated with the name of the Danite village of Shaalbim ('haunt of foxes').²⁸ Margalith believes that in the period of Philistine domination the colloquial Greek word for fox, λαμπουρις ('torch-tail') was introduced into the local Canaanite aetiological legends. Secondly, in revenge for the murder of his wife by the Philistines, Samson 'struck them hip and thigh with a great blow' (15.8). Although the text does not quantify the number of casualties, Boling describes this scene as 'a tremendous slaughter', where Samson left the Philistines as 'a tangle of legs and thighs'.²⁹ I believe that the inclusion of these examples of military folklore is designed to emphasise Samson's prowess by reinforcing the stories of Samson's infusion with the spirit of Yahweh and the linked riddle episode.

²⁶ Robert G. Boling translates אלף ('thousand') as 'contingent' and he argues that this 'recovery of the old military usage ... brings a popular story into the realm of the plausible'; *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 6A; New York: Doubleday, 1975), pp. 237-238.

²⁷ Othniel Margalith, 'Samson's Foxes', *VT* 35 (1985), pp. 224-229 (227).

²⁸ Shaalbim (Judg. 1.35) / Shaalabbin (Josh. 19.42) was located in the original territory of Dan. See BDB, 'שַׁעֲלָבִים', p. 1043.

²⁹ Boling, *Judges*, p. 235.

A Trap Within a Trap: Samson's Riddle

The wedding-feast riddle episode is a central theme of Judges 14, which is in fact the only Old Testament example of a complete riddle narrative used in a social context in ancient Israel.³⁰ The text records Samson's riddle (v. 14), the Philistines' response (v. 18a) and Samson's final retort (v. 18b). In general, riddles depend on ambiguity within language, simultaneously communicating on both surface and sub-surface levels. Indeed, Crenshaw notes that 'essential to riddles is the setting of a trap'.³¹ They attempt to mislead the hearer by offering coded language that masquerades as common speech. As Samson was surrounded by Philistines ('young men' and thirty 'companions'), he astutely uses a riddle to exert his authority on the wedding feast by turning a potential physical contest into a verbal one.³² Niditch comments that Samson's riddle, based on the assumption 'I know something you don't know', is an attempt to gain power over his Philistine in-laws.³³ Although Samson had certainly been trapped by Yahweh into marrying the Timnite as an 'opportunity' to trap the Philistines, Samson also used his riddle to set a trap for his Philistine bride. I therefore propose that the structure of this complex 'trap within a trap' may be summarised as follows:

The spirit of Yahweh rushed upon Samson (v. 6)
Samson thus empowered to kill the lion (v. 6)
Samson ate the honey from the lion's carcass (vv. 8-9)
Samson set his riddle (vv. 12-14)

³⁰ Indeed, eight of the seventeen Old Testament occurrences of the word חִידָה ('riddle') are found in this chapter.

³¹ James L. Crenshaw, *Samson: A Secret Betrayed, a Vow Ignored* (London: SPCK, 1979), p. 100.

³² Block believes that the word 'companions' used to identify these thirty men (Judg. 14.11) is 'ambiguous' and he suggests they were in fact 'bodyguards', placed by the Philistines because they were afraid of Samson; *Judges*, pp. 431-432.

³³ Susan Niditch, 'Samson as Culture Hero, Trickster and Bandit: The Empowerment of the Weak', *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 608-624 (620-621).

Surface meaning (v. 15): *Trap for Samson's wife*
Betrayal of Samson by his wife (v. 17)

Sub-surface solution (v. 18a): *Trap for the Philistines*
Samson's retort (v. 18b)

The spirit of Yahweh rushed upon Samson (v. 19)

Samson thus empowered to kill Philistines (v. 19)

The layers of this riddle episode will now be examined in some detail.

Samson's first two actions under the control of the spirit of Yahweh (Judg. 14.6, 19) form an inclusio around the riddle episode (vv. 12-18). It is clear to the reader (but obviously not to the Philistines) that Samson's spirit-empowered killing of the lion and eating the honey from its carcass provided him with the subject-matter for his riddle. To pay the hefty wager after his riddle was solved he was again empowered by the spirit, this time to kill thirty Philistines. This forms the main plot of the riddle episode. This riddle was a trap for the Philistines set by Yahweh, who through his spirit provided his agent Samson with both the inspiration for the riddle and the means by which he could pay the resulting debt. Camp and Fontaine comment on the irony here that 'the human skill and inspiration for non-violent manipulation of social conflict is given by God and, paradoxically, that the human skill and drive for outrageous violence also comes on the same divine breath'.³⁴

However, contained within this story is a sub-plot describing how the Philistines obtained the answer to Samson's riddle. Indeed, the entire riddle episode hinges on the question of whether Samson's riddle could in fact be solved by the Philistines. Samson's challenge to the Philistines was as follows:

מִהָאֵכֶל יֵצֵא מֵאֵכֶל
וּמִשֵּׁן יֵצֵא מִתּוֹק

³⁴ Claudia V. Camp and Carole R. Fontaine, 'The Words of the Wise and their Riddles', in Susan Niditch (ed.), *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore* (SBL Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 127-151 (148).

From the eater came something to eat,
and from the strong came something sweet (Judg. 14.14).

Samson's riddle thus comprises two statements, each of three words, and employs synonymous parallelism.³⁵ Two-line parallelism is the typical style of Hebrew poetry, as evidenced in the book of Proverbs. Indeed, Prov. 1.6 states that one of the goals of that book is 'to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles [חידה]'. Therefore the sequence of riddles in Judges 14 further ties this unit to biblical wisdom traditions.

Nel shows that the main strategy of Samson's riddle is to highlight the two key words, 'strong' and 'sweet', and simultaneously to signify a 'particular reality' encompassing them both.³⁶ In this case, the eater is identified with the strong and the thing to be eaten is identified with something sweet. Thus, the Philistines would have been (mis)led to ask a question like, 'What is sweet to eat that comes out of a strong eater?' Assuming that the 'strong eater' is the bridegroom, two possible answers are immediately suggested by the wedding feast context. First, it has been suggested that the 'something sweet' could be vomit induced by heavy drinking at the wedding 'feast'.³⁷ Secondly, the more likely possibility is that the riddle suggests copulation, a topic which is naturally associated with wedding celebrations. In this solution the 'sweet food' signifies semen, which Crenshaw suggests 'is sweet to the bride who "eats" the sperm'.³⁸ This perceived functional similarity between eating and copulation is well illuminated by the lascivious text of Prov. 30.20 which describes the act of an adulteress: 'she eats and wipes her mouth and says, "I have done no wrong"'. Although erotic

³⁵ Crenshaw, *Samson*, p. 112.

³⁶ Philip Nel, 'The Riddle of Samson (Judg. 14.14, 18)', *Bib* 66 (1985), pp. 534-545 (543).

³⁷ Camp and Fontaine, 'Words of the Wise', p. 141; Crenshaw, *Samson*, p. 114.

³⁸ Crenshaw, *Samson*, p. 115. Camp and Fontaine further contend that the 'strong eater' may be either the bridegroom or the woman; 'Words of the Wise', pp. 141-142.

subject-matter *appears* to provide the answer to the riddle, this is only a surface-level solution which functions as a diversionary trap, aimed, as we shall see, more at Samson's bride than at the Philistines in general.

Samson's riddle has been attacked on two grounds. First, a riddle must provide a genuine clue that makes the question inherently answerable. Secondly, the subject of the riddle must belong to a shared experience. As Crenshaw points out, 'Samson's riddle hardly meets either criterion'.³⁹ How then could the Philistines possibly work out the correct (sub-surface) meaning of his challenge? Camp and Fontaine argue that, far from being a 'bad riddle', Samson's riddle is carefully crafted, using linguistic and metaphorical resources to generalise from his personal experience so as to make the riddle answerable, 'if exceedingly difficult'.⁴⁰ This may be a theoretical possibility, but I believe that this credits the Philistine wedding guests with more insight than they could have realistically mustered in the context of their extended 'drinking bout'! I therefore conclude that it was impossible, on a practical level, for the Philistines to solve Samson's riddle, as it was based on his experiences with the lion which he alone knew about. The text makes it clear that Samson did not tell his father or his mother that he had killed the lion, or that the honey which he gave them came from its carcass (Judg. 14.6, 9).

Although we must assume that the Philistines worked out the surface-level sexual meanings of Samson's riddle, they were also sufficiently alert to recognise that these were misleading traps. The stakes were high and in their desperation to outwit Samson they followed the trail of sexual innuendo to his bride, threatening her with death unless she could 'entice' the real solution from him (Judg. 14.15). Where better to find out the inspiration for Samson's saucy riddle? However, by involving Samson's wife in the contest the Philistines unwittingly forced her into the hidden trap set for her by Samson. Nel emphasises the centrality of 'love' in the riddle,

³⁹ Crenshaw, *Samson*, p. 113.

⁴⁰ Camp and Fontaine, 'Words of the Wise', p. 148.

suggesting that 'Samson was unable to resist the love of his new bride'.⁴¹ However, the text does not provide evidence of love between Samson and the Timnite woman, merely indicating that Samson was attracted to her (14.3, 7). Despite his desire for this woman, I believe that he used the opportunity presented by his riddle to find out where her true affections lay.

It is crucial to emphasise that the only person apart from Samson who knew the solution to his riddle was his wife, because she was the only person he had told (Judg. 14.17).⁴² No one else knew about the 'particular reality' of the lion-honey event which had inspired Samson's riddle. Therefore he knew for certain that it was she who had betrayed him when the Philistines came to him with the correct answer: 'What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?' (v. 18a). Samson's retort, 'If you had not ploughed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle' (v. 18b), cuts to the heart of the sub-plot in this episode. Samson had tested the integrity of his bride, and in his eyes she had now been found wanting.

The words 'ploughed' and 'heifer' in Samson's caustic response to the Philistines reveal his suspicion that they had obtained the solution to the riddle by sleeping with his wife. Indeed, Crenshaw believes that 'one would be hard put to discover a more apt description of the sexual act'.⁴³ A thinly veiled example of this 'ploughing' metaphor in Israelite literature may be found in Song of Solomon 4.12a: 'A garden locked is my sister, my bride'. Although ploughing is not mentioned explicitly here, the metaphor is that gardens (like women) are for 'cultivation'.⁴⁴ Samson's contempt for his bride is evident in his abusive description of her as his 'heifer' (עֵלָה). The 'haughty'

⁴¹ Nel, 'Riddle of Samson', p. 544.

⁴² Judg. 14.16 confirms that Samson had not even told his parents.

⁴³ Crenshaw turns Samson's statement into the familiar riddle, 'What fertile field is ploughed, but not with oxen?'; *Samson*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ More explicit sexual references to 'ploughing' may be found in the song of Inanna. See S.N. Kramer, 'Sumerian Sacred Marriage Texts', *ANET*, pp. 637-645 (643).

women of Samaria are similarly attacked in Amos 4.1, where they are effectively called 'fat cows' (פרות הבשן).⁴⁵

Samson was angry with the Philistines for 'cheating' and with the Timnite woman for betraying him. Empowered by the spirit of Yahweh, Samson exacted his revenge on the Philistines and grudgingly paid them his debt (Judg. 14.19). With indecent haste Samson's wife was then given to his so-called 'companion', his 'best man' (v. 20). Maybe this was the man she truly loved and who had already been intimately involved with her in finding out the solution to Samson's riddle? However, Samson's rather pathetic attempt to reclaim his wife (15.1-2) reveals how successfully she had trapped ('enticed') him with her sexuality. Although Samson had exposed her unfaithfulness with his riddle trap, he was obviously still infatuated with her. However, this circular web of intrigue ended in tragedy for the Timnite woman and her father, as the Philistines blamed them for Samson's arson attack on their crops and they were themselves burnt to death (15.6). Although the cycle of violence initiated by the Timnite woman's betrayal of Samson eventually resulted in her death, the sexual trap which she embodied was to be repeated twice more in Samson's life.

Uncontrolled Lust: Samson Visits the Gaza Prostitute

The short story of Samson's one-night stand with the prostitute (זנה) in Gaza (Judg. 16.1-3) sits rather uneasily between the detailed descriptions of his protracted relationships with the Timnite woman and Delilah. Samson's involvement with this prostitute emphasises how he is trapped by his need to satisfy his sexual urges. We are simply told that he 'saw' (ראה) this woman and he 'went in to her' (בא אל) (v. 1), suggesting only a minimal relationship with her prior to sexual intercourse. This contrasts with the time Samson spent courting the affections of the Timnite woman. After the disastrous failure of his marriage to the Timnite, Samson was attempting to

⁴⁵ Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah* (WBC, 31; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 332.

avoid any sentimental involvement and, as Soggin believes, he was therefore 'content with a transaction of a commercial kind'.⁴⁶

Although this Gaza prostitute is generally regarded as being a Philistine, this is not made explicit in the text. Indeed, Exum argues that she may have been a 'foreign woman', perhaps even an Israelite, who happens to live in Philistia.⁴⁷ Schneider develops this theory, believing that the prostitute's apparent failure to notify the authorities about Samson's presence indicates that she is not responsible for the ensuing Philistine ambush attempt.⁴⁸ In any event, Samson's entrapment by the prostitute provided Yahweh with another 'opportunity' to act against the Philistines.

Matthews compares Samson's brazen entrance into the major Philistine city of Gaza with his earlier act of going to the Philistine settlement of Timnah.⁴⁹ The reaction of the men of Gaza could thus be explained either by reference to Samson's previous actions against the Philistines (if these stories are sequential), or simply as the indignant reaction of the locals to an Israelite who had dared to use the 'services' of their city. Although the Philistines plan to trap Samson when he is fatigued by spending a night of passion with the prostitute, he once again tricks his enemies, this time by his early departure with their city gates on his shoulders (Judg. 16.3).⁵⁰

The folkloristic character of this narrative centres on Samson's superhuman act of uprooting and transporting the gates. However, Margalith believes that 'this story cannot refer to a real city-gate, as archaeological facts prove'.⁵¹ Excavations of city gates of the period provide evidence of two huge monolithic posts dovetailed into the threshold and the lintel, with the upper part of the wall resting on

⁴⁶ J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary* (trans. J. Bowden; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 256.

⁴⁷ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 69.

⁴⁸ Schneider, *Judges*, p. 217.

⁴⁹ Matthews, *Judges*, p. 155.

⁵⁰ Niditch, 'Samson as Culture Hero', p. 621.

⁵¹ Othniel Margalith, 'The Legends of Samson/Heracles', *VT* 37 (1987), pp. 63-70 (68).

them. In order to pull up the two doors along with the posts, 'bar and all' (Judg. 16.3), Samson would have had to lift off the lintel with the whole upper city wall resting on it. Margalith contends that this unrealistic story does not have an aetiological purpose. Instead, he equates the image of Samson setting up the doorposts of the city gate on a hilltop in front of Hebron while the two doors rested on his shoulders with the image of Heracles, Keeper of the Gates of Olympus, well-known in Greek mythology.⁵²

It is more likely that Samson's symbolic act of carrying the gates to Hebron should be interpreted as a political statement. Hebron was in the tribal allotment of Judah (Josh. 15.1-13) and Matthews argues that 'it is therefore ironic that Samson returned these pilfered gates to the men of Judah, who had helped the Philistines capture him' (Judges 15).⁵³ Perhaps, by his defiant act of carrying the gates towards Hebron, Samson was inciting the men of Judah to resist Philistine domination and fight for their freedom. Thus Samson's escape from the trap set for him in Gaza points forward to further violent action against the Philistines. Samson himself acts as the spearhead for this struggle through his climactic destruction of the temple of Dagon, facilitated by his final, and most tragic, entrapment by a woman.

Unreciprocated Love: Samson and Delilah

Through intense interweaving of love and betrayal, the story of Samson and Delilah (Judg. 16.4-22) describes the honeytrap in which Samson was finally caught. In concise narrative, vv. 4-5 provide the reader with all the essential information needed to understand the following story. First, we are told that after his fling with the Gaza prostitute Samson at last *loved* (אהב) a woman. This contrasts with his earlier relationships; where Samson was attracted simply by what he *saw* (ראה) (14.1; 16.1). However, the text is notably silent about Delilah's feelings towards Samson. We must therefore assume, with Crenshaw, that this episode is a dramatic

⁵² Margalith, 'Legends', p. 69.

⁵³ Matthews, *Judges*, p. 156.

tragedy of ‘unreciprocated love’.⁵⁴ Ironically, Samson’s love for this woman also led him into a trap, one where he would lose the very sight which had drawn him into earlier traps laid by ‘unsuitable’ women.⁵⁵

Secondly, Delilah is categorised by her location, ‘in the valley of Sorek’ (נַחַל שֹׂרֵק), rather than by her ethnicity or nationality. The valley of Sorek (‘valley of red grapes’)⁵⁶ is a large flood bed region running from the hill country of Judah and Dan, through northern Philistia, to the Mediterranean coast. Klein thus associates Delilah with the uncontrolled torrents of the flood bed and the pleasant but dangerous loss of control identified with wine, ‘both strongly suggestive of overwhelming passions’.⁵⁷ Block regards the hilltop near Hebron to which Samson carried the gates of Gaza (Judg. 16.3) as ‘a foil against which to read this event’.⁵⁸ Rather than loving a ‘safe’ Israelite woman from the high country of Hebron, Samson once again chooses the danger of dating a ‘foreign’ woman from the lowlands.

Finally, and uniquely for a woman in the Samson story, Delilah (דִּלְיָה) is named. Segert observes that ‘there are few names in the Hebrew bible for which so many and so different etymologies have been proposed’.⁵⁹ One favoured possibility cites the Arabic word *dalla*, meaning ‘flirtatious’.⁶⁰ Another credible suggestion is based on the Hebrew noun דָּלָה which describes long ‘hanging’ hair in Song

⁵⁴ Crenshaw, *Samson*, pp. 91-92.

⁵⁵ Schneider, *Judges*, p. 204. Also note my earlier comments concerning the Timnite woman.

⁵⁶ The term ‘sorek’ (שֹׂרֵק) is connected with a high quality grape vine (Isa. 5.2; Jer. 2.21). See Stanislav Segert, ‘Paronomasia in the Samson Narrative in Judges XIII-XVI’, *VT* 34 (1984), pp. 454-461 (458).

⁵⁷ Lillian R. Klein, ‘The Book of Judges: Paradigm and Deviation in Images of Women’, in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (FCB, 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 55-71 (61).

⁵⁸ Block, *Judges*, p. 453.

⁵⁹ Segert, ‘Paronomasia’, p. 460.

⁶⁰ For example, Boling, *Judges*, p. 248 and Segert, ‘Paronomasia’, p. 460.

7.5 (MT 7.6).⁶¹ Perhaps the most evocative possibility is that Delilah is a pun based on לילה, thus meaning 'of the night'.⁶² Despite Brettler's confidence that wisdom themes are 'absent' from Judges 16,⁶³ this last interpretation effectively links Delilah to the forbidden woman of Prov. 7.9 who traps men 'at the time of night and darkness'. Although most of these etymologies indicate that Delilah's name is of Hebrew origin, this appears inconsistent with the presumption that she was a Philistine. Indeed, Exum notes that 'only a few commentators raise the possibility that Delilah ... might be Israelite'.⁶⁴ However, is it likely that an Israelite woman would have betrayed Samson to the Philistines? Klein avoids etymological speculation and is confident that Delilah is a Philistine, 'possibly a heroine to her own people, who perpetrates an age-old and repugnant ruse: using a man's love to bring him down'.⁶⁵

The Seduction of Samson

If Judg. 16.4 sets the stage for the following account, v. 5 sets the agenda. Samson has become such a serious menace that the five 'lords' (סרניים) of the Philistine Pentapolitan cities unite in a conspiracy to trap him.⁶⁶ Their strategy involved engaging the services of Delilah to 'seduce' Samson to reveal the secret of his strength. As Block observes, just as the Philistines had earlier used Samson's bride to 'entice' from him the secret of his riddle (14.15), they now plan to use Delilah to 'uncover the answer to the riddle of his person'.⁶⁷

⁶¹ BDB, 'הַלֵּלָה', p. 195. Although הַלֵּלָה can also mean 'poor' (i.e. 'weak'), any suggestion that Delilah was a submissive woman is unsupported by the biblical text.

⁶² Block, *Judges*, p. 454.

⁶³ Brettler, *Judges*, p. 56.

⁶⁴ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 69.

⁶⁵ Klein, 'Paradigm and Deviation', p. 66.

⁶⁶ סרניים designates the five rulers of the Philistine Pentapolis: Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath and Gaza (Josh. 13.3; Judg. 3.3). See H.J. Katzenstein, 'Philistines: History', *ABD*, V, pp. 326-328 (326).

⁶⁷ Block, *Judges*, p. 454.

I have already associated elements of the Samson story with a countertestimony of the hiddenness of Yahweh based on links with wisdom theology. However, a less benign theme of countertestimony is also apparent in Samson's entrapment by both the Timnite woman and Delilah. In each episode, the Philistines commanded the woman to 'entice'/'seduce' Samson using the piel imperative form of the verb פתה. The Timnite woman was told to 'entice [פתה] your husband to tell us what the riddle is' (Judg. 14.15 ESV). Delilah was similarly instructed to 'seduce [פתה] him, and see where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to humble him' (16.5 ESV).

Brueggemann highlights the use of the verb *htp* by the prophet Jeremiah in a passionate complaint against Yahweh: 'O LORD, you have deceived me [פתה], and I was deceived [פתה]' (Jer. 20.7 ESV). He uses this text as an example of Israel's countertestimony, as evidence that 'Yahweh is *abusive* on occasion'.⁶⁸ Brueggemann believes that this 'extraordinary' reference to Yahweh suggests that 'Yahweh has been dishonest, has misrepresented or misled in order to have Yahweh's way'.⁶⁹ He further observes that פתה contains sexual overtones and that it is even used elsewhere to refer to 'manipulative or violent sexual exploitation ... wherein the proposed sexual partner is either taken by deception or is forcibly seized'.⁷⁰ Brueggemann specifically includes Judg. 14.15 and 16.5 as examples of such texts.⁷¹ I propose that these episodes, where women trap Samson by manipulative and deceptive sexual seduction as part of Yahweh's plan for his life, provide another facet of countertestimony in this story. This somewhat disturbing countertestimony bears witness to Yahweh's further abuse of Samson's personal liberty.

Whereas in Judges 14 the the Philistines had employed blackmail to engage the Timnite woman in their plot, here they offer Delilah a

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 359, italics original.

⁶⁹ Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 360.

⁷⁰ Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 360.

⁷¹ The other two examples Brueggemann uses are Exod. 22.16 (MT 22.15) and Job 31.9.

considerable financial incentive. Presuming that there were five Philistine lords who *each* promised her 1,100 shekels of silver (כֶּסֶף), Delilah's reward for trapping Samson would have made her very wealthy. It surely cannot be coincidence that each Philistine lord promised Delilah as much silver as Micah later stole from his mother (Judg. 17.1-6). Indeed, Schneider rejects suggestions of textual error, arguing that Micah's mother could have been Delilah.⁷² This possibility, though only implied by the text, suggests that the Danite migration of Judges 17-18 is intended to be read as the continuation of the Samson narrative.

The Binding of Samson

The entrapment theme in the Samson narrative is emphasised by repeated attempts to bind him (כָּבַד) in Judges 15 and 16. From the Philistine point of view, binding Samson to deprive him of his freedom is the inevitable consequence he must suffer for causing them so much misery. The binding subplot begins in Judg. 15.10, where the Philistines 'come up to bind Samson' and concludes in Judg. 16.21, where the Philistines finally seized Samson and 'bound him with bronze shackles'. In between these framing verses we read how Samson was restrained four times, once by the men of Judah (15.13) and three times by Delilah (16.8, 12a, 14a).⁷³ However, these attempts to secure Samson all failed and on each occasion he easily broke free (15.14; 16.9, 12b, 14b).

Samson's interest in the Timnite woman not only endangers himself but also traps the people of Judah when the Philistines came up to fight them at Lehi (Judg. 15.9). When asked to explain the reason for this incursion, the Philistines reply, 'We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us' (v. 10b). Samson's response, 'As they did to me, so have I done to them' (v. 11b), echoes the

⁷² Schneider, *Judges*, pp.231-232.

⁷³ Although the text specifies that Delilah 'bound' Samson twice (Judg. 16.8, 12a), her action in v. 14a of weaving his hair into the web of the loom was in response to her stated desire to 'bind' him (v. 13) and had the same restraining effect as binding him.

wisdom-literature interest in cause and effect. Brettler notes that this idea is explored using the same doubling of the verb עָשָׂה ('to do') in Prov. 24.29: 'Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done"'.⁷⁴ Although Samson submitted to the Judahites and 'they bound him with two new ropes' (Judg. 15.13), when the Philistines came to claim their prisoner, the spirit of Yahweh empowered Samson to break free and go on a killing spree (vv. 14-17). Although Yahweh provided Samson with the means of escape and revenge, as Matthews observes, 'freedom from bondage here does not include freedom from God's design'.⁷⁵ Indeed, this was merely the first of the sequence of binding episodes inexorably drawing Samson towards the climax of his mission as Yahweh's agent against the Philistines.

After making her deal with the Philistine lords, Delilah set to work. Matthews describes the process by which she trapped Samson as a 'rhetorical contest', initiated by her bold question: 'Please tell me where your great strength lies, and how you might be bound [אָסַר], to humble you' (Judg. 16.6).⁷⁶ However, Samson thwarts this, and her two further attempts to bind him, by means of three deceptions.

Samson deliberately misled Delilah three times concerning the means by which he could be weakened and thus 'be like any other man' (Judg. 16.7, 11, 13). He first deceived her by claiming that he could be restrained by 'seven fresh bowstrings [יָתֵדִים] that have not been dried' (v. 7).⁷⁷ However, Samson responded by easily snapping these cords (v. 9). His second trick was to tell Delilah that he could be bound with 'new ropes [עֲבָתִים] that have not been used' (v. 11). However, this was the method previously used by the Judahites in Judg. 15.13-14 and the outcome here was similar: 'he broke them off his arms like a thread' (16.12). Samson's third deception was to tell Delilah to 'weave the seven locks of [his] head into the web of the

⁷⁴ Brettler, *Judges*, p. 52.

⁷⁵ Matthews, *Judges*, p. 153.

⁷⁶ Matthews, *Judges*, p. 160.

⁷⁷ יָתֵד may mean cord (rope or sinew), bowstring (Ps. 11.2), tent-cord (Job 4.21); BDB, 'יָתֵד', p. 452.

loom' (v. 13).⁷⁸ As Block comments, 'now he is really playing with fire, since his hair represents the key to the riddle of Samson'.⁷⁹ Despite courting disaster, when Samson awoke he simply pulled out the pin and again freed himself (v. 14).

Clearly frustrated by her three failures to subdue Samson, Delilah resorted to a combination of emotional blackmail, 'How can you say, "I love you," when your heart is not with me?' and a return to her original question, 'you have not told me where your great strength lies' (Judg. 16.15). Indeed, Delilah nagged Samson until, rather ominously, 'his soul was vexed to death' (v. 16). Under this pressure his will was finally broken and 'he told her all his heart' (v. 17a). So, after being lulled by the uniform pattern of three deceptions, events are suddenly brought to an unexpected conclusion. Blenkinsopp considers that this evidence of an intentional '3+1 structure' means that this part of Judges 16 may be included among 'some of the best examples of OT literary art'.⁸⁰

In Judg. 16.17b Samson discloses his lifelong Nazirite status to Delilah and for the first time the text connects this, his uncut hair and his strength:

A razor has never come upon my head,
for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb.
If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me,
and I shall become weak and be like any other man.

In this startling revelation, the turning point of Samson's life, we witness a decisive shift of power from the 'strong' man to the 'weak' woman. Smith observes that, for Samson, 'knowledge is power' and when he shares this knowledge then power passes to his enemies,

⁷⁸ The Hebrew MT of Judg. 16.13 is incomplete and is generally restored using the LXX.

⁷⁹ Block, *Judges*, p. 458.

⁸⁰ J. Blenkinsopp, 'Structure and Style in Judges 13-16', *JBL* 82 (1963), pp. 65-76 (74-75).

since they are able to use it to subdue him.⁸¹ By divulging his divine secret Samson was now comprehensively trapped, ironically by losing a 'rhetorical contest' reminiscent of the riddle challenge he had earlier used to trap his unfaithful Timnite bride.

Delilah then delivers Samson, the former wild man of nature, over to the urban Philistines.⁸² She is so confident that Samson has at last told the truth that the Philistine lords brought her ill-gotten reward. Somewhat suggestively, Delilah then 'made him sleep on her knees' (Judg. 16.19), thus demonstrating her power over Samson. Schneider draws a parallel here between the actions of Delilah and Jael (Judg. 4.17-22; 5.24-27).⁸³ Both of these women turned on a strong man who they had lulled to sleep in a false sense of security. However, Schneider recognises the crucial difference that while Jael's murder of Sisera symbolised Israelite victory, Delilah's subjugation of Samson marked a defeat for Israel's last judge. While Samson slept, Delilah shaved off his hair (16.19).⁸⁴ Exum notes that Samson is passive during both his consecration as a Nazirite before birth (ch. 13) and now as the key symbol of his Nazirite status is removed while he slept.⁸⁵ Samson was trapped into Nazirite service by Yahweh and now his Nazirite obligation ends in a trap laid by a woman, both occurring without his knowledge or consent.

After Samson's haircut we are immediately told that 'his strength left him' (Judg. 16.19), although Samson only became aware of this later. Presumably he did not really believe that his strength would depart if his hair was cut, as he expected to be able to go out as

⁸¹ Carol Smith, 'Samson and Delilah: A Parable of Power?', *JSOT* 76 (1997), pp. 45-57 (51).

⁸² Gregory Mobley notes the similarities between the Samson-Delilah story and the account of the humanisation of the wild man Enkidu in the Akkadian Gilgamesh Epic; *The Empty Men: The Heroic Tradition of Ancient Israel* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 2005), pp. 193-194.

⁸³ Schneider, *Judges*, p. 223.

⁸⁴ The MT clearly reads וַתִּגְלַח ('and she shaved'). Other Hebrew manuscripts read וַיִּגְלַח ('and he shaved'), causing some to debate whether Delilah or her male accomplice actually shaved Samson.

⁸⁵ Exum, 'Theological Dimension', p. 44.

before and shake himself free (v. 20). Although Samson had now broken the only Nazirite obligation imposed on him by the angel (13.5), he seems to trust that, as before, Yahweh will continue to guarantee him strength.⁸⁶ However, the narrator now reveals the tragic reality that Samson 'did not know that Yahweh had left him' (16.20). Exum believes that the theological significance of this delayed revelation is to emphasise that 'the source of Samson's strength is Yahweh, and not his unshorn locks'.⁸⁷ Although Yahweh himself had selected Samson to be his agent against the Philistines, Samson had now been deserted and abandoned to his fate. Perhaps this is Yahweh's ultimate abuse of Samson.

The Philistines now grasped their opportunity to seize Samson, gouging out his eyes and imprisoning him in Gaza (Judg. 16.21). Block observes how the many ironies in Samson's life have come to fruition:

Overnight this man is transformed from one whose life is governed by sight and whose actions are determined by what is right in his own eyes into a blind man with eyes gouged out. ... Overnight a man with the highest conceivable calling, the divinely commissioned agent of deliverance for Israel, is cast down to the lowest position imaginable: grinding flour for others in prison.⁸⁸

A remarkable parallel to Samson's fate may be found in Jer. 52.11, which describes Zedekiah's treatment by Nebuchadnezzar.⁸⁹ Like Samson, Zedekiah's eyes were put out, he was bound in bronze fetters and then put into 'the house of the mill' (LXX: οἰκίαν μύλωνος). In subjecting Samson to such punishment, the Philistines were in fact following accepted Mesopotamian practice towards

⁸⁶ David M. Gunn, 'Samson of Sorrows: An Isaianic Gloss on Judges 13-16', in Danna Nolan Fewell (ed.), *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), pp. 225-253 (245).

⁸⁷ Exum, 'Theological Dimension', p. 43.

⁸⁸ Block, *Judges*, p. 462.

⁸⁹ cf. 2 Kgs 25.7; Jer. 39.7.

prisoners of war. Van der Toorn argues that Samson's fate was not exceptional by such standards, as cuneiform inscriptions describe large numbers of defeated enemies being constrained to do menial grinding work, often after having been blinded.⁹⁰ By forcing prisoners to grind in 'milling houses' (*bīt asīrī*, equivalent to the Hebrew *bēt hā^u sîrîm*) they were humiliated by being given work traditionally assigned to slaves and women. Samson had earlier used trickery and strength to avoid capture at Gaza when he visited the prostitute there, but now he was returning as an impotent and humbled prisoner.

This looks like the end for our hero. Surely the weakened and blinded Samson can no longer play an effective role as Yahweh's agent against the Philistines? However, the narrator skilfully interjects again, hinting at further unexpected developments by making the self-evident but pregnant observation: 'But the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved' (Judg. 16.22). Crenshaw, making a play on the meaning of Samson's name, comments: 'With one sweep of his brush, the artist has extinguished ominous clouds with the sun's radiance. Samson, the solar one, will rise again.'⁹¹ We are encouraged to read on, to discover how Samson will make his escape from this seemingly hopeless situation in order that he might fulfill his divine mission to begin to save Israel from the Philistines (13.5).

Conclusion

The story of Samson's adult life is not, as often suggested, primarily a description of how he repeatedly broke the conditions of a Nazirite vow. Instead, it demonstrates theological countertestimony expressed within the framework of sexual entrapment. Samson's 'mixed' marriage to the Timnite woman, his one-night stand with the Gaza prostitute and his unreciprocated love for Delilah all demonstrate how Yahweh (ab)used these women as successive

⁹⁰ K. van der Toorn, 'Judges XVI 21 in the Light of the Akkadian Sources', *VT* 36 (1986), pp. 248-253 (249).

⁹¹ Crenshaw, *Samson*, p. 97.

honeytraps to ensnare Samson. Yahweh enabled Samson to escape from these traps to provide a series of 'opportunities' for him to act unwittingly as Yahweh's agent against the Philistines (Judg. 14.4). The wisdom-literature theme that I have identified in Samson's adult life acts as countertestimony of the hiddenness of Yahweh in these events. However, there is also evidence of a more overtly abusive form of countertestimony where the Timnite woman and Delilah 'entice'/'seduce' Samson. Although Yahweh eventually permitted the Philistines to trap Samson, their victory was to be short-lived, as Samson's imprisonment provided the setting for his key role in Yahweh's climactic entrapment of three thousand Philistines and their god, Dagon (16.23-31).

Christian interpretation has traditionally been uncomfortable with the images of God revealed in Israel's countertestimony and has occasionally even skewed the biblical message in order to suppress them in favour of core testimony. Indeed, Brueggemann states that:

the Only One of Israel is not innocently 'omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient', as too much Christian theology has insisted, but is a God present with and absent from, a God to be praised in full adoration and assaulted as an abuser.⁹²

The countertestimony model that I have used to study Samson has revealed evidence of Yahweh's hiddenness and abuse. Surely the coexistence of these facets of God's character alongside his undoubted 'steadfast love' (חסד) invites us to reassess our view of God. Far from an exercise in deconstruction, recognising the diversity of God's personality can help to deepen our faith through increased understanding of his nature.

This episode of the Samson narrative reveals that Yahweh used unholy means and unholy people to further his holy purposes.

⁹² Walter Brueggemann, 'Biblical Theology Appropriately Postmodern', in Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (eds.), *Jews, Christians and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (SBL Symposium Series, 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), pp. 97-108 (104).

Yahweh used honeytraps to sexually ensnare Samson in order that he could use Samson to exact his holy vengeance against the Philistines and their god Dagon. Moreover, God continues to use ordinary people as his instruments against rival deities of our age, for example, materialism and love of power. Just as God used Samson, the 'wild man', he uses us today, in spite of and even because of our shortcomings.

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Fred H. Ruddell

The Calls and the Expectations of Wisdom towards her Audience in Proverbs 1-9 (Part 2)

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The First Expectation of Wisdom: The Call for Insight and the Raising of Voice for Understanding (Proverbs 2:3)

Meinhold and Müller depicted Prov 2 as a “*Lehrprogramm*.”¹ The programmatic character of chapter 2 made some scholars suggest that it might actually constitute a better introduction for Prov 1-9 as a whole.² The chapter encapsulates many key motifs, which occur elsewhere in Prov 1-9.³ In Prov 2, certain poetic techniques are taken to extremes such as the extension of the conditional clause (עַם), which was previously used in Prov 1:10-11.⁴ Eißfeld regarded Prov 2 as a single sentence.⁵ If this latter point can be sustained, I think the way in which one can visualize this chapter is like taking a long, deep breath before uttering a lengthy speech as the speaker has to go on for twenty-two verses until he encounters a full stop. Beside these grammatical aspects the chapter seems to promote something very essential in terms of the expectations of the father, respectively Wisdom. Proverbs 2 reiterates some of the terms encountered in 1:20-33 and thus the instruction betrays the fact that relationship between humans and Wisdom is reciprocal.⁶ There are further

¹Arndt Meinhold, *Die Sprüche: Teil 1: Sprüche Kapitel 1-15* (ZBAT 16.1; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1991), 43, 62; Müller, *Proverbien 1 – 9*, 52.

²Scott, *Proverbs*, 16.

³Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 60-1.

⁴Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 64; Otto Eißfeld, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 472.

⁵Eißfeld, *The Old Testament*, 472.

⁶Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 43. Point also supported by Perdue: “It is important to note the literary linkages of this first part of the instruction with the opening didactic poem in 1:20-33, which also contains elements of a speech of persuasion. . . . Like Woman Wisdom, who earlier ‘cries out’ and ‘raises her voice’ (1:20-21) in the public places of the city to persuade the simple to learn of her, the ‘son’ in chapter 2 is to respond in kind by

essential connections between 1:20-33 and chapter 2. Proverbs 1:20-26 (which encapsulates Wisdom's call, "*admonition*"/"*Mahnung*" and "*chiding speech*"/"*Scheltrede*" and "*threat speech*"/"*Drohhrede*") and 2:1-5 together with 1:11-15 (the section concerned with the robbers) and 9:1-6 (Wisdom's third speech) may be docketed with the descriptive label of "*dramatic delay*."⁷ In 1:20-33 Wisdom calls but she does not receive an answer, whereas in 2:3 the exemplary student "... greets insight and discernment with a shout of acclamation."⁸ Basically, the son is "*urged*" to perform the same thing as Wisdom, to "*call*." The call of Wisdom to humans is "*echoed*" by the call of humans for Wisdom, as lovers seeking each other in the street (Cant 3:1-2 LXX; 5:6; Prov 7:4).⁹ Plöger also talked about the aspect of "*Schatzsucher*," "*lover-seeking*" in Prov 2:4.¹⁰ Fox stated: "*Yet not even a desire for wisdom is sufficient; the*

'crying out' for 'insight' and by raising his voice for 'understanding' (2:3)." See further Perdue, *Proverbs*, 89. I would also add the invitation of the robbers as a speech of persuasion. Murphy also presumed a connection between Prov 2 and 1:20-31, see further Murphy, *Proverbs*, 15.

⁷ Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (JSOTS 170; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 442. Watson defined "*dramatic delay*" as: "*In such cases the beginning of an action is described but only later is the reason (or the effect) of the action (or sequence of actions) made clear.*"

⁸ McKane, *Proverbs*, 282. McKane noted that Prov 2:3 "... is almost a personification . . ." of בִּינָה and תְּבוּנָה. See further the similar view in Waltke, *Proverbs*, 221; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 110; Müller, *Proverbien 1 – 9*, 62, n. 6; Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 230.

⁹ Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 43.

¹⁰ Plöger, *Sprüche*, 25. He wrote: "*Sie findet ihren Ausdruck in der Eigenbetätigung des Schülers, der nach Weisheit sucht und nach ihr forscht wie ein Schatzsucher nach verborgenen Schätzen (V. 4).*" See further Gemser, *Sprüche*, 25. Gemser detected the same thing somewhat earlier: "*Bedingung für Erlangung des Segens der Weisheit ist die dauernde, eifrige Bemühung um sie; man muß nach ihr suchen, wie Schatzgräber nach vergrabenen Kostbarkeiten.*" See further Kayatz, *Proverbien 1-9*, 98-102. See further Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 18. Ringgren, following Gemser, also articulated the same aspect that the son has to make a greater effort in terms of reaching out for Wisdom and seeking her just as those who bury

pupil must take the initiative and actively summon – ‘call to’ – wisdom.”¹¹ The son is encouraged to make his ear attentive to wisdom and to incline his heart to understanding (2:2)¹² and to call out for insight and to raise his voice for understanding (2:3). This becomes all the more important when we see this encouragement to call in the sequence of the speech of the robbers in 1:10-14 and then Wisdom’s call in 1:20-33. In invitations, which encapsulate elements of a speech of persuasion¹³ the son is called by the robbers (1:10-11), then by Wisdom (1:20-33) and furthermore the son is not asked to stand idle either in 2:1-4,¹⁴ where the elements in question reoccur.¹⁵

treasures look for hidden treasures: “... sie wollen den Weisheitsbegriff nur stärker hervortreten lassen - , muß man sich bemühen und sie ‘wie Schatzgräber nach vergrabenen Kostbarkeiten’ (Jer. 41,8; Mt 15,44) suchen (Gemser).” See further Scott, *Proverbs*, 43. Scott’s opinion too tallied with that of Gemser and Ringgren: “*The same figure of the arduous search for precious metals appears in the striking poem on the inscrutable source of wisdom, in Job xxxviii.*” Scott probably meant Job 28 and not 38. I think that this search for Wisdom as a quest for a lover becomes even more prominent in the other two expectations of Wisdom.

¹¹ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 110.

¹² Proverbs 2:2 is a partial chiasmus with an unchanged /a/ element. See further Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (JSOTS 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 204; Watson, *Techniques*, 339; Nicholas P. Lunn, *Word-Order Variation in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Differentiating Pragmatics and Poetics* (PBM; Bletchley: Paternoster, 2006), 108. See further Watson, *Techniques*, 371. In terms of the function of the partial chiasmus in Prov 2:2, Watson explicated the chiasmus as “*to express reversal of existing state. . . which perhaps indicates that further subdivisions of function is necessary. The chiastic pattern is used to emphasize the meaning of the words: that a drastic change is either imminent or has already taken place.*” Proverbs 2:2 stresses the change that will be enacted by the diligent pupil, who unlike the audience in 1:20-33, will embrace wisdom, understanding and knowledge. Proverbs 3:10 is another example of the same chiasmus. See further Watson, *Techniques*, 382. The chiasmus in Prov 2:2 also exhibits a sound pattern, namely assonance.

¹³ Perdue, *Proverbs*, 89.

¹⁴ Meinhold, *Sprüche*, 64. Meinhold wrote: “*Über diese aufnehmende, hörende Tätigkeit hinaus ist es nach V.3f. an dem Schüler, selbst einse*

He is conditioned to listen attentively to wisdom (2:2a) and to call out for insight (2:3a). I mentioned the view that Prov 2 takes to extreme some poetic techniques in relation to 1:10-19.¹⁶ Why do I highlight this again? The enticing address of the robbers in 1:10-14 resembles very closely 2:1-4. If the son “receives” what the father says (2:1a: אָמַר), conditional clause (2:1a), as opposed to what the sinners are saying (1:11a: אָמַר), and “treasures” the father’s commandments (the same verb צָפַן is used here for “treasure” in 2:1b and 2:7a as in 1:11c and 18b for “ambush”)¹⁷ and if the search for wisdom (2:2a), understanding (2:2; 2:3b) and insight (2:3a) is sought like silver and hidden treasure (2:4; conditional clause),¹⁸ then the son will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God (2:5).¹⁹ This is in contradistinction to the call of the sinners, the clause being conditional (אִם; in 1:10a; 2:1a, 4a),²⁰ who “ambush”

starke, suchende Aktivität zu entwickeln.” See further Müller, *Proverbien 1 – 9*, 62. Müller wrote in similar fashion: “In v.3 wird der Schüler zu dieser in v.2 eingeführten Größe in Beziehung gesetzt. Soll er in v.1 noch passiv hören und das Gebot des Lehrers aufbewahren, so soll er nun aber auch die Weisheit selbst anrufen.”

¹⁵Perdue, *Proverbs*, 89.

¹⁶Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 64.

¹⁷Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 43. Proverbs 1:19 is wrongly listed in Van Leeuwen’s commentary as a verse in which the verb צָפַן occurs. The right locus is 1:18.

¹⁸Watson, *Techniques*, 169, n. 294. Proverbs 2:4 is a half-line (internal) parallelism. Similar examples in Prov: 1:18; 3:2; 3:7; 3:22; 4:5; 4:7; 5:19a; 6:10 (= 24:33); 6:12a; 6:13; 6:14; 6:17a; 6:19b; 6:23; 6:32a; 7:7; 7:12a; 8:2a; 8:3a; 8:14; 9:2 etc.

¹⁹This latter verse may be seen as the contrast of Prov 1:29, where Wisdom in her “chiding speech” (“Scheltrede”) spurns the audience for hating knowledge and not choosing the fear of the Lord.

²⁰Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 110. Regarding Prov 2:3 a midrashic interpretation in *b. Ber. 57a* reads אִם, “mother” instead of אִם, “if,” so “for you will call understanding ‘Mother’.” This is buttressed by the Tg. (אִמָּא לְבִינְתָא חֲקֵרִי) and extensively cited by medieval commentators. This was based on 7:4, i.e., “and call understanding your friend.” See further Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 76; Healey, “The Targum of Proverbs,” 15, n. 2. Healey noted

their own lives (1:18b: קָצַף) and to the goods and plunder promised by the robbers (1:13-14). Therefore, it is evident that 2:1ff plays upon the quest for treasure just as 1:10-14 does.²¹

I think it is important to note that the verb employed in the conditional clause of 2:3a for expressing what the son is conditioned to perform is קָרָא, “call,” just as in the previous section Wisdom “calls” (1:21a; 8:1a; 9:3a: קָרָא). Moreover, the same expression קוֹל יְהוָה is used in 2:3b as in respect to Wisdom in 1:20a and 8:2a, connecting the son’s “emotional call” with that of Wisdom even more strongly.²² So I conclude that this inferred expectation and urging of the son to call out for Wisdom emphasizes again that aspect, according to which what Wisdom’s calls express and reveal is somewhat different than what the calls of her counterparts express and reveal. This “calling out” and “raising of the voice” is not expected by any of Wisdom’s counterparts, which point I think is very significant. The instruction of Wisdom and that of the father makes it lucid that in the process of the differentiation between the competing calls that although Wisdom’s calls are similar to that of her counterparts they can still be distinguished not only by the way in which Wisdom’s calls are public through and through without any hint of devious concealment but also by the way in which she expects her audience to perform something in turn.

The Second Expectation of Wisdom: The Seeking and Searching for Understanding (Proverbs 2:4)

Proverbs 2:4 also commences with the conditional אִם, pointing back to 1:10-11 and to what I noted above that chapter 2 develops some of the poetic techniques of 1:10-11.²³ With this verse the scene changes,

that the reading of the Tg. makes Prov 2:3b difficult to comprehend. The Syr. does not include it.

²¹ Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 43; Perdue, *Proverbs*, 89.

²² Waltke, *Proverbs*, 221. Waltke did not list Prov 8:2a.

²³ Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 64; Perdue, *Proverbs*, 88. For further treatments of Prov 2:4 see further Schäfer, *Poesie*, 54-6; Gemser, *Sprüche*, 25; Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 18; Lelièvre and Maillot, *Proverbes*, 43-4, 49-50; Plöger, *Sprüche*,

Wisdom appears and her high worth is mentioned.²⁴ The son is encouraged not only to call (2:3) but also to seek (שָׁקַח) understanding like silver (2:4a: בִּסָּפֶר) and search (חָפֵץ) for it as for hidden treasures (2:4b: בְּמִטְחֹן),²⁵ i.e. a reference to the treasure imagery. An intensive searching and finding is necessary.²⁶ Then (אָז) the son will understand (בִּין) the fear of the Lord (2:5a) and find (מָצָא) knowledge of God (2:5b). Seeking and searching, and respectively finding are prominent features of Proverbs, especially in the first and second speeches of Wisdom. The first part of Wisdom's "threat speech"/"Drohrede" in 1:28 formulates what happens when the audience calls (1:28a: קָרָא) and seeks (1:28b: שָׁחַר) Wisdom when it is too late. The result is that Wisdom will neither answer (1:28a: עֲנֶה), nor let herself to be found (1:28b: מָצָא). So the second expectation of Wisdom in 2:4-5 is that the son should not only hearken to the wholehearted seeking of understanding but also to search for her as one would search for hidden treasures. Wisdom is more precious and desirable than all treasures, although she is not against the accumulation of wealth if it is performed in the right way.²⁷ To

24-6; Toy, *Proverbs*, 33; Oesterley, *Proverbs*, 14; Cohen, *Proverbs*, 9; Greenstone, *Proverbs*, 17; McKane, *Proverbs*, 282; Scott, *Proverbs*, 43; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 110; Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 76-7; Waltke, *Proverbs*, 221-2; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 15; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 47; Whybray, *Commentary*, 22; Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1964), 61; Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 43. For a treatment of the LXX text of Prov 2:4 see D'Hamonville and Dumouchet, *Proverbes*, 167-9.

²⁴ Meinhold, *Sprüche*, 64.

²⁵ The same occurs in Job 3:21b. What a striking contrast between 3:21 and Prov 2:4! In Job 3:21 Job talks about those who long for death but that does not seem to come and dig for it more than for hidden treasures. In Prov 2:4 the son is encouraged to seek and search for understanding, being provided with the hope that he will find. Thus death in Job 3:21 contrasts the life-beaming passage of Prov 2:4.

²⁶ Meinhold, *Sprüche*, 64; Lelièvre and Maillot, *Proverbes*, 49-50; Scott, *Proverbs*, 43; Kidner, *Proverbs*, 61.

²⁷ Cohen, *Proverbs*, 47; Oesterley, *Proverbs*, 60; Greenstone, *Proverbs*, 81; McKane, *Proverbs*, 346; Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 102-7; Whybray,

understand (בין) and to find (מָצָא), just as in 2:5 is also connected in 8:9. In 8:9 Wisdom states that her words are straight (יָבֵהָ) to the person who understands (8:9a: בין) and right (יָשָׁר) to those who find (מָצָא) knowledge (8:9b). This verse is followed by two verses (8:10-11), in which Wisdom claims that her instruction should be taken instead of silver (8:10a) and knowledge rather than choice gold (8:10a), because wisdom is better than jewels (8:11a) and all that one may desire cannot be compared with her (8:11b), i.e. another instance of the importance of the treasure imagery. This is followed by a covert allusion to the house imagery in 8:12, when Wisdom specifies that she cohabitates with prudence (8:12a) and finds (מָצָא) knowledge and discretion (8:12b).²⁸ In 8:17 Wisdom demands reciprocal love, followed by a verbatim reiteration of the aspect of seeking and finding mentioned in the “*threat speech*”/“*Drohrede*” in 1:28b, which in 8:17b becomes a positive statement: וּמִשְׁחֵרֵי יִמְצְאוּנִי, i.e., those who will love Wisdom will also experience that seeking her will not be futile as in 1:28b but she will let herself to be found. Proverbs 8:17 and the aspect of seeking and finding is again followed by a section concerned with something similar, in which the worth of Wisdom is compared to earthly wealth, i.e. again an additional reference to the treasure imagery. Moreover, Wisdom claims that if she is hearkened to and accepted, then she will bestow wealth and fill the storehouses with wealth, i.e., house and treasure imagery intertwined. Finally, 8:35a also encourages the finding of Wisdom, which results in genuine life: כִּי מִצְאֵי (מִצְאָה) [מָצָא] חַיִּים. Therefore, the second expectation to seek and to search for understanding is connected with knowledge not only in 2:4-5 but also in the second speech of Wisdom, i.e. in 8:9. Moreover, the aspect of seeking and finding Wisdom is especially significant not only in the expectation stated in 2:4-5 but also in the first and second speeches of Wisdom.

Commentary, 50; R. N. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs* (JSOTS 99; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 102; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 270; Kidner, *Proverbs*, 78; Barucq, *Proverbes*, 87.

²⁸ Lelièvre and Maillot, *Proverbes*, 201.

The Third Expectation of Wisdom: To Love Wisdom and not to Forsake Her, to Prize Her Highly and to Embrace Her (Proverbs 4:6, 8)

Emphasis is placed on the aspect of reciprocal love, especially in Prov 8:17. Wisdom not only requires to be loved by her devotees but she also makes it clear that she rejoices over humankind with great joy (8:30-31).²⁹ Love is not only an expectation in Prov 1-9 but also a metaphor, which may be treated as a separate imagery.³⁰ Regrettably there is not enough space here to provide a treatment of the love imagery present in Prov 1-9³¹ but only to focus on how it functions as an expectation on the part of Wisdom towards her devotees. How the relationship between Wisdom and the instructed is envisaged in Prov 1-9 is an important question. It is described not only in terms of reciprocal call, or reciprocal seeking and searching but also in terms of reciprocal love. Proverbs 9:1-5 may be cited (cf. 1:20ff and 8:1ff) as an example of how Wisdom, the “true partner” calls humankind to herself. Leaving aside the debate as to how much the Egyptian idea about the love of the goddess Maat has influenced the metaphor of love and the love of Wisdom in Prov 1-9,³² it is still possible to maintain that something “remarkable” happens to reason as it begins to seek and search knowledge. Wisdom addresses

²⁹ See further Exod 20:6, where God talks about those who love him, i.e., **אֲהַבְתֶּם**. Concerning reciprocal love see further Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 181; Toy, *Proverbs*, 168; Cohen, *Proverbs*, 45; Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 166-76; Plöger, *Sprüche*, 90; Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 98-100, 111; Barucq, *Proverbes*, 88; Boström, *Proverbiastudien*, 162-3; McKane, *Proverbs*, 350; Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 92; Kayatz, *Proverbien 1-9*, 77, 98-102; Schäfer, *Poesie*, 207; Whybray, *Commentary*, 49; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 95; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 51; Meinhold, *Sprüche*, 142; Walke, *Proverbs*, 404, 404, n. 87; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 275. For a philological treatment of Prov 4:6-9 see further Van Der Weiden, *Proverbes*, 44-5. For a treatment of the LXX text of Prov 4:6, 8 see D’Hamonville and Dumouchet, *Proverbes*, 183.

³⁰ Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 98-100, 111 (“Liebesmetaphorik,” “reziproke Formel” in Prov 8:17).

³¹ See further R. E. Murphy, “Wisdom and Eros,” *CBQ* 50 (1988): 600-3.

³² Kayatz, *Proverbien 1-9*, 77, 98-102; Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 167, 174; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 276.

humankind and it is on her way towards them, speaking to them from the place, for which reason is searching but which it cannot attain by its own efforts (Job 28). Wisdom “moves” towards men and seeks their ear and for this very reason Wisdom “. . . must, indeed, may now be loved by man.”³³ For this reason the pupil is urged not to forsake (עָזַב) Wisdom (Prov 4:6a), since she will keep (שָׁמַר) her devotee (4:6a) and to love (אָהַב) her (4:6b) because she will guard (נָצַר) her lover (4:6b). This verse seems to achieve an “*inclusio*” between 4:5a and 4:7:

4:5a - קְנֵה חִכְמָה קְנֵה בִינָה

4:6 - אַל-תִּשְׁוֹבָה וְתִשְׁמָרְךָ אֶהְבָּה וְתִצָּרְךָ - 4:6

4:7 - רֵאשִׁית חִכְמָה קְנֵה חִכְמָה וּבְכֹל-קִנְיֶיךָ קְנֵה בִינָה

Proverbs 4:7 seems not only to interrupt the sequence of the parental appeal between 4:6 and 4:8³⁴ but also to create a chiasmic structure:

“A Get wisdom (5).

B Keep wisdom and she'll reward you (6).

A' Get wisdom (7).

B' Keep wisdom and she'll reward you (8).”³⁵

The root קָנָה, which occurs three times here (4:5a; 4:7a; 4:7b) is the root, which also occurs in 8:22a, producing a wordplay. The way in which God made (קָנָה) Wisdom as at the beginning (רֵאשִׁית) of his way (8:22a: הִרְךָ) parallels how the son is also encouraged to realize that the beginning (רֵאשִׁית) of wisdom is to get (קָנָה) wisdom (4:7a) and insight (4:7b: בִּינָה). The verb קָנָה conveys the “*acquisition*” metaphor, which is combined with the treasure imagery in 16:16.³⁶ Some have

³³ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 167-8. Cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 295. Fox reckoned that the fact that the wise love Wisdom is a “*truism*.” He found it “*surprising*” that Wisdom loves the wise.

³⁴ Waltke, *Proverbs*, 280-1; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 175.

³⁵ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 175; Waltke, *Proverbs*, 279; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 63.

³⁶ Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 240. The acquisition metaphor or “*die Metapher vom Erwerben der Weisheit*.” Proverbs 16:16 reads:

seen in this acquisition metaphor allusions to the praising of a bride in Israel.³⁷ Again in 4:8 the metaphor of embracement³⁸ appears when the pupil is also encouraged to prize (רום) Wisdom highly and she will exalt him (4:8a: סָלַל) and to embrace (חָבַק) her and she will honour him (4:8b: כָּבֵד).³⁹ The reward at the fulfilment of this expectation is the putting on the head of a graceful garland (4:9a: חֵן לִיָּהּ) and the bestowing (מָנַן) of a beautiful crown (4:9b: תְּפָאֶרֶת) on the head of the devotee.⁴⁰ Wisdom loves those who love her and those who seek her will find her (8:17). Wisdom also “congratulates” the devotee who like a lover, watches day after day at her doors (8:34) and invites him to lodge with her.⁴¹ The authors of Proverbs demanded that the pupils might strive for something more than the utilitarian advantages of the teachings of the sages and the learning of wisdom. They stressed the substantial character of

קָנָה-חֶכְמָה מִהַטּוֹב מִחֶרֶץ וְקִנּוּת בִּינָה נִבְחָר מִכֶּסֶף.

For a treatment of 16:16 as part of 16:16-30 see Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold*, 215-21.

³⁷ Meinhold, *Sprüche*, 92-3; Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 240. Baumann disagreed with Meinhold.

³⁸ Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 242.

³⁹ For additional treatments of Prov 4:6, 8 see further Müller, *Proverbien 1 – 9*, 110-6; Schäfer, *Poesie*, 106-10; Gemser, *Sprüche*, 33-4; Kayatz, *Proverbien 1-9*, 110-1, 116; Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 25-6; Barucq, *Proverbes*, 67; Lelièvre and Maillot, *Proverbes*, 83-4; Plöger, *Sprüche*, 46-7; Duesberg, *Proverbes*, 338-9; Toy, *Proverbs*, 86-9; Cohen, *Proverbs*, 22; Greenstone, *Proverbs*, 39-40; Oesterley, *Proverbs*, 30; McKane, *Proverbs*, 305-6; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 174-5; Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 107; Perdue, *Proverbs*, 112-3; Waltke, *Proverbs*, 278-82; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 27; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 63; Whybray, *Commentary*, 30-1; Kidner, *Proverbs*, 66-7; Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 58-9.

⁴⁰ Note how the term עֲטָרָה, “crown” also appears in Isa 28:3 but in a negative connotation in relation to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim. While the term תְּפָאֶרֶת, “beauty” occurs in 28:4 referring to the “fading flower of its glorious beauty” (צִיָּת נָבֵל עֲבֵי תְּפָאֶרֶתוֹ). Cf. G. Boström, *Proverbiastudien: Die Weisheit und die fremde Weib in Spr. 1-9* (LUÅ N.F. Avd. 1. Bd 30, Nr 3; Lund: Gleerup, 1935), 168.

⁴¹ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 168, 172.

emotional commitment, a desire for learning. This love impels one to seek and search the mysteries of wisdom and knowledge and permits learning to impress itself on the character of the pupil. Without love, knowledge is “*inert*.” Therefore, one is expected to love Wisdom (4:6; 7:4; 29:3; 8:34). In Proverbs “*love*” and “*hate*” are not two mere emotions. They reflect the polar mind-sets that describe the shape and the development of a person’s character. Wise men are typified by love of wisdom and hate of wickedness, whereas fools are characterized by their crooked love and hatreds. Fools hate wisdom (1:29) and they despise rebuke (1:30) and instruction (5:12). The thoughtless loves his thoughtlessness (1:22a). The “*cynic*” delights in his own cynicism (1:22b)⁴² and all those who hate Wisdom love death (8:36). A sluggish man is not only jaded but loves sleep (20:13). A quarrelsome man is not just easily provoked to anger but loves transgression (17:19). To be wise is not merely to know wisdom, but also to love and seek it and this love meets that of Wisdom, i.e., “... *the attraction of like to like* (8:21).”⁴³ Wisdom is attracted to humankind and vice versa by the energy of eros or the “*spiritual-intellectual eros*” (“*der geistige Eros*”), the way von Rad called it. The portrayal of reciprocal love between Wisdom and humanity reflects the language employed in the description of the seduction of the wife and the temptress. Wisdom is likened to a lover who seeks and is sought in turn by her beloved (8:17, 34-35; cf. Cant 3:1-4; 5:2-6:2). The assumed sexual connotations in the description of Wisdom are more muted than is usually believed and in Prov 8 assume a lesser profile. Eros is the desire for completion by filling a void in itself. In this way, the declarations of reciprocal between Wisdom and humankind promulgate this “*intellectual eros*.” Wisdom’s “*pique*” towards those who repel her call infers a need for love (1:24-33).⁴⁴

This intellectual love is developed further in Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon. The sages speak in the style of biographical confessions

⁴² Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 275-6.

⁴³ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 276.

⁴⁴ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 294-5.

about the wooing of Wisdom and the amazing successes of her efforts in Sir 51:13, 19, 26f⁴⁵ and Wis 8:2, 16.⁴⁶

Apparently in Israel a picture has been created of the “*highly remarkable*,” “*ideal man*” who is in a quest for knowledge. What awaits this ideal man is almost described in a voluptuous manner, if he offers Wisdom the trust she requires and hearkens to the words which she tells him. The picture of this ideal man motivated by a love of knowledge has not been described more “*beautifully*” and “*modestly*” than by Sirach in 14:20-27.”⁴⁷

Possibly, von Rad was right when he postulated that: “*If there was, somewhere in Israel, a surrender, verging on the mystical, of man to the glory of existence, then it is to be found in these texts which can speak of such sublime bond of love between man and the divine mystery of creation. Here man throws himself with delight on a meaning which rushes towards him; he uncovers a mystery which was already on its way to him in order to give itself to him.*”⁴⁸ This love relationship creates a tension through being wooed and anticipating precious intellectual satisfaction. Therefore, in this process of wooing Wisdom proffers everything that a man, “*in his isolation*,” might need: wealth and honour (Prov 8:18, 21), guidance and security in life (1:33ff; 2:9ff; 4:6; 6:22; 7:4f), knowledge of God and rest for the soul (2:5; Sir 6:28; 51:27).⁴⁹ Wisdom even sets out to meet her lover (Sir 15:2; Wis 6:13-16) and waits at his door.⁵⁰ Her offers “. . . *can only be described, with full theological weight of the word, as ‘salvation benefits.’ Here, all striving for success, for mastery of life, fades into silence.*”⁵¹ Wisdom’s invitation to give oneself intellectually to her together with her gifts and offers are not

⁴⁵ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 168.

⁴⁶ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 168; L. Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (SB 11; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000), 125.

⁴⁷ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 168-9.

⁴⁸ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 169. See further Sir 15:2 and Wis 6:12-16.

⁴⁹ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 169. See further Sir 6:26-28 and 4:15.

⁵⁰ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 169; Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 165.

⁵¹ Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 169.

anymore means towards the attainment of a purpose in life but ends in themselves.⁵²

The Fourth Expectation of Wisdom: To Call Wisdom “My Sister” and Insight “Intimate Friend” (Proverbs 7:4)

The final expectation towards the instructed is in agreement with the previous ones. Calling, seeking, searching, loving and finally calling Wisdom my sister and insight intimate friend. The father instructs the son in an appeal to keep his words (7:1a), to treasure up his commandments (7:1b), to keep his commandments and he will live (7:2a) and to keep his teaching as the apple of his eye (7:2b). The succeeding verse is concerned with the binding of the father’s teaching on the finger (7:3a) and with their binding on the tablet of the heart (7:3b).⁵³ The following verse, which changes the theme,⁵⁴ encapsulates the expectation to say (אָמַר) to Wisdom, “*You are my sister*” (7:4a: אָחוּת) and to call (קָרָא) insight (בִּינָה) intimate friend (7:4b: מוֹדֵעַ). This parental appeal is immediately followed by the extensive section concerned with the seduction of the Strange Woman (7:6-22), which makes this expectation even more significant. There are some examples in the Hebrew Bible, which recall the same expression אָחוּת אִתִּי. The expression occurs in Gen 12:13 as part of Abram’s request to Sarai. Then again in Gen 24:60 in relation to Rebecca and in Ezek 16:45 a similar expression is to be found in relation to the personified sisters of Jerusalem and Samaria. The term מוֹדֵעַ occurs in Ruth 2:1, while 3:2 encapsulates the related term מוֹדֵעַת, “*kindred*.”⁵⁵ The expectation of Prov 7:4 has sometimes

⁵²Von Rad, *Wisdom*, 169.

⁵³ See further Plöger, *Sprüche*, 76; Hilaire Duesberg, *Les Scribes Inspirés: Introduction aux Livres Sapientiaux de la Bible. Le Livre des Proverbes* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1938), 397. Duesberg reckoned that Prov 7:3: “*C’est bien là une expression de scribe . . .*”

⁵⁴ Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 245.

⁵⁵ Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 246-7. The expression אָחוּת הוּא also appears in Gen 12:19; 20:2, 5, 12; 26:7, 9; Lev 18:11. Cf. Oesterley, *Proverbs*, 50. The latter term entails an intimate knowledge.

been regarded as a quasi marriage relationship with Wisdom.⁵⁶ Here it appears as an encouragement to become a sibling of Wisdom and of insight. Therefore, this is not a call to a wedding ceremony but it is an indication of blood-relationship established with Wisdom from early childhood. Through this form of address, which calls Wisdom sister and intimate friend, she appears as a reader and listener.⁵⁷

Summary

In conclusion, as I said above, Weeks claimed that only those who are instructed are able to differentiate between true and perverted speech, so the opposition or contrast between the speeches of Wisdom and that of her counterparts finds its main fulfilment in this stress on instruction throughout Prov 1-9.⁵⁸ I am not entirely disagreeing with this view but if the uninstructed are unable to distinguish between true and perverted speech, then how will they come to the point where they can distinguish between true or perverted speech and how will they ever decide that they want to be instructed at all when in the first instance they are unable to perform any of these? This point is important when the issue is addressed from the point of view of the פתאים. However, the same point may be examined from the perspective of the apparent affinities between the speeches of Wisdom and that of her counterparts, which allegedly

⁵⁶ Boström, *Proverbiastudien*, 161-2; Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 106; Meinhold, *Sprüche*, 125 (cf. Tob 7:15).

⁵⁷ Baumann, *Weisheitsgestalt*, 247. See further Müller, *Proverbien 1 – 9*, 137-40; Schäfer, *Poesie*, 198; Gemser, *Sprüche*, 43; Kayatz, *Proverbien 1-9*, 98; Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 35; Barucq, *Proverbes*, 83; Lelièvre and Maillot, *Proverbes*, 155-6, 164-5; W. A. Van Der Weiden, *Le Livre des Proverbes: Note philologiques* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 68 (Van Der Weiden alluded to the friendship of Kothar wa Hasis and Hassis: “Kothar est ton camarade et Hassis ton ami.”); Plöger, *Sprüche*, 76; Toy, *Proverbs*, 145; Oesterley, *Proverbs*, 50; Cohen, *Proverbs*, 39; Greenstone, *Proverbs*, 69; McKane, *Proverbs*, 334; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 240-1; Delitzsch, *Proverbs*, 157; Perdue, *Proverbs*, 134; Waltke, *Proverbs*, 369-70; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 43; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 87; Whybray, *Commentary*, 45; Van Leeuwen, *Proverbs*, 84.

⁵⁸ Weeks, *Proverbs 1-9*, 82.

are so emphatic that the audience finds it difficult to differentiate between them. Is the problem to be found in the indistinguishable aspect of the speeches or in the attitude of the uninstructed? Knowing this when will the audience ever be able to distinguish between these speeches and how is it possible to reach this crucial point? The possible answer may be to become instructed. This raises a further dilemma, namely, that to become instructed one must differentiate between the speeches of Wisdom and that of her counterparts. However, if these speeches appear to be so alike that it is impossible to know which is which, then this becomes an impediment. The other possibility is for the פְּתָאִים to have some ability to perform a distinction between the competing speeches but if this is denied, then that is a hindrance too. The speeches of Wisdom and that of her counterparts are truly alike but they also have features that make them distinct from one another and perhaps the פְּתָאִים also have some ability to make the necessary judgment.

This question leads to two possible answers. First, that the question of the understanding of the uninstructed is somewhat more complex than one would think and second one might postulate a “*deus ex machina*” intervention in the state of the uninstructed, which would make them able to decide to want to be instructed so that in the end they might show capability of differentiating between true and perverted speech.⁵⁹ What I suggest is that Wisdom’s calls in terms of the way in which Wisdom reveals herself, lacking any hidden element or secrecy, then her luxury to be able to withdraw herself, to remain silent and to be critical towards the audience and finally making clear that she has expectations are evident signs of the fact that her speeches are somewhat different than those of her counterparts. I think the uninstructed can hear and see these aspects in Wisdom’s calls fairly clearly. Or would one suggest that the uninstructed audience would have found it hard to distinguish

⁵⁹ I presume Weeks’s views concerning the “*uninstructed*” are possibly based on the definitions of the פְּתָאִים. As I have pointed out before, I do see in Weeks’s treatment a lack of clear distinction between the different grades of fools.

between the chiding and threatening voice of Wisdom in 1:20-33 and the smooth call with an offer of instant gratification presented by the Strange Woman in 7:14-20? Or were the uninstructed unable to distinguish between the appealing and instantly gratifying invitations of the Strange Woman and Folly and the slightly more time consuming process of calling for Wisdom, understanding and insight?⁶⁰ Could not the uninstructed differentiate between the evident expertise of Wisdom and the lack of it in the case of the robbers, the Strange Woman and Folly? What about the expectations recommended by Wisdom and the wisdom teachers? Do Wisdom's counterparts enumerate expectations of this kind? The expectations of Wisdom however, are not there to intimidate those who are ready to become instructed. The son is encouraged to call and he is promised to receive an answer, to seek and search in order to find, not to forsake Wisdom in order to be kept, to love her in order to be guarded, to prize Wisdom highly which results in exaltation and to embrace her in order to be honoured by her. I think that it is reasonable that these expectations were not designed to be chores but invaluable promises designed to reinforce Wisdom's claims and the benefits of internalizing her instruction. What Wisdom's counterparts are offering are indeed instant and immediate gains and pleasures but just as quickly as they appear to give pleasure just as swiftly the end result turns out to be doom. Similarities and differences in terms of Wisdom and her counterparts walk hand in hand and therefore, highlighting and examining both of them was essential.

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⁶⁰ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 110. I think Fox's comment in relation to Prov 2:4 supports my reasoning: "Not even 'calling out' to wisdom suffices; one must actively strive for it, seeking it as eagerly as . . . [חַסְדִּים] . . . [חַסְדִּים] are treasures that are hidden or buried and thus not easily accessible. There is some ambivalence about the accessibility of wisdom (contrast 8:1-5). In this passage, the need to expend effort on its behalf is stressed." Furthermore Perdue wrote: "Though it [Wisdom] is a gift that cannot be grasped, at the same time wisdom comes only to those who search for it as a greatly valued treasure (see Job 28)." See further Perdue, *Proverbs*, 89; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 15; Oesterley, *Proverbs*, 14.

